



Digging Deeper into File Association

June 17, 2003
By Neil J. Rubenking

I read your tips religiously, and they're always useful. But I tried one that deals with file associations, and somehow it didn't work for me.

I use an old WordPerfect for Windows 6.1 application that I can't quite abandon yet. When I installed WordPerfect, the file associations were set so that the extensions .dat, .frm, .wpd, and .wpt were all associated with Wpwin.exe.

This worked fine for a long time, because those extensions weren't used by any other program. But now I have quite a few DAT files that are not WordPerfect files, and I'd like to associate those files with either WordPad or Notepad. So I followed the instructions in one of your tips.

- I located a file with the .dat extension via Explorer.
- I held down the Shift key while right-clicking on the file.
- I asked to open it with WordPad.
- I checked the box marked Always open with this program.

The procedure worked fine, but it also associated all the other WordPerfect extensions with WordPad, which, of course, screwed things up royally. How can I fix this to single out just the .dat extension, remove it from the list of files associated with Wpwin, and then reassociate this file type with WordPad?

Mack Terry

File association is actually a two-step process. The file extension is associated with an internal file type, and the internal file type is associated with the program. That makes it easy to associate multiple extensions with the same program; they all point to the same internal file type. It also means, as you've found, that changing the association for one extension belonging to a given file type changes it for all of them. What you need to do is cut .dat out of the herd of extensions associated with Wpwin.

First, repeat the steps you listed to reassociate the .dat extension with Wpwin, thereby reassociating all the other WordPerfect extensions. Verify that WordPerfect opens those files correctly. Now launch REGEDIT by entering its name in the Start menu's Run dialog. Double click on the first root key, HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT. Scroll down to the subkey named .dat and select it.

You'll see in the right-hand pane that it has a (Default) value, and the data for this value is the name of the internal WordPerfect file type. Double-click the (Default) value, delete its data, and click OK. Now repeat the earlier technique to establish an association for DAT files. Now it affects only DAT files, without dragging along any other types.

Copyright (c) 2003 Ziff Davis Media Inc. All Rights Reserved.